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Russian Who Won Asylum in Britain Is Back in Moscow

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MOSCOW, Sept. 18 — A Soviet journalist who spent the past year in Britain turned up here today and said that he was abducted in 1983 by British agents while attending the Venice Film Festival and had been forced to make anti-Soviet statements.

The journalist, Oleg G. Bitov, 52 years old, spoke at a news conference called by the Soviet authorities. He had disappeared in London last month.

[In London, the British Government said Mr. Bitov came to Britain of his own free will last year and it called his statements in Moscow "absurd and offensive."]

At the news conference, Mr. Bitov said that he had planned to return to the Soviet Union all along. He said he had waited until he won the confidence of his purported captors and had then simply bought an airline ticket and boarded a plane.

Mr. Bitov was flanked by officials of Novosti, the Soviet feature agency, and of Literaturnaya Gazeta, the weekly on which he worked as foreign culture editor before his disappearance at the Venice Film Festival. He seemed calm and read a prepared statement with dramatic inflection.

"As I returned to my hotel late at night on Sept. 8, 1983, I took my key, as usual, at the desk, crossed the street to reach my villa, rang the door bell and, as the buzzer sounded at the hotel's main building, the door opened, but there was no light that time for some reason. I paid no attention and stepped forward into the darkness only to get a terrible blow at the back of my head," Mr. Bitov said.

He said that this was followed by a period of semiconsciousness — "psychotropic injections did their job well" — and a flight from Pisa to London with a forged British passport in the name of David Locke.

He said he came to on Sept. 16 at a hotel in East Grinstead, south of London, where drug treatment purportedly continued. He said he was questioned two or three times a week at an army barracks, and then offered "a well-paid job in the gallery of mud-slinging anti-Sovieters."



United Press International

Oleg Bitov yesterday at news conference in Moscow.

Refers to Statements in Britain

Seven weeks after he arrived in Britain, Mr. Bitov said, a statement was made in his name in which he said he had defected and that the defection had been in protest against Soviet cultural policy and the treatment of Soviet intellectuals and, most immediately, in indignation over the shooting down of the South Korean jetliner that had strayed into Soviet airspace.

Today he contended that he had not made that statement of his own accord. He said:

"I, Oleg Bitov, on whose behalf the secret service men appealed to public opinion, hereby declare with a full sense of responsibility: This fabrication belongs wholly and entirely to the specialists of the British intelligence service."

"Nowadays it is easy to make up any text, keeping the tone of one's voice and intonation, out of disconnected phrases taken from various conversations, with the help of special technology."

He said he had signed the statement because "I am no hero" and he was certain that British agents would have killed him if he refused.

It was not immediately clear from his remarks whether he was referring to a written statement made in his name or to a voice broadcast that he said had been pieced together.

Bitov Was on Tour of the U.S.

Mr. Bitov said he had decided to play for time by pretending to cooperate. That was why, he said, he did things like signing long-term book projects and touring the United States.

In the statement, Mr. Bitov listed the names and telephone numbers of Britons who he said had been "responsible for this foul act of violence."

In answers to questions, he said articles published in Britain under his name had been either prepared by intelligence agents or written by him to lull his captors.

These writings presumably included an open letter he wrote to Konstantin U. Chernenko, the Soviet leader, asking among other things that his wife and daughter be allowed to join him. Mr. Bitov acknowledged that he had sent formal invitations to his wife and daughter in August, but he said he did this knowing that he would be in Moscow before the applications could be acted on.

Mr. Bitov denied that he had returned to be with his family. When he disappeared from Britain last month, there was speculation that he had decided to return to his wife, Lyudmila, and their teen-age daughter, Kseniya.

Today, he seemed prepared for questions about the money, car and other belongings he had left behind. But when asked what flight he took from London and from what wing of Heathrow Airport, Mr. Bitov said he was saving that information for a book.

The news conference was given wide publicity by the Soviet press and television. Tass announced the news conference on an urgent basis, and it was shown on the evening television news.

His disappearance from Venice, too, was accompanied by unusual Soviet publicity. Defections are usually passed over in silence, but Mr. Bitov's newspaper, Literaturnaya Gazeta, published two articles saying that he had been abducted and possibly murdered and demanding action from the Italian authorities.

The weekly gave foreign correspondents copies of a letter from Mr. Bitov's mother to the editor, Aleksandr Chakovsky, insisting that her son could not have defected.

Oleg Bitov is the brother of Andrei Bitov, a writer who fell afoul of authorities in 1979 as one of the contributors to an unofficial collection of literary works, Metropolis.

Andrei Bitov was gradually getting back into print when his brother turned up in Britain last year, and the writer's name once again disappeared from Soviet publications. One of the first signs that Oleg Bitov might be back in the Soviet Union was the publication two weeks ago of an article by his brother in Literaturnaya Gazeta.

In London, Duff Hart-Davis, a British writer who worked with Mr. Bitov, wrote in The Sunday Telegraph last weekend that he was convinced Mr. Bitov stayed in the West of his own accord in September 1983.

"It should be emphasized that neither I nor anyone else who met him in England has the slightest doubt that he defected voluntarily," Mr. Hart-Davis wrote.

"Even if he now surfaces in Moscow and claims that he was kidnapped in Venice by the C.I.A., or writes something to this effect in an article, I shall know it is a lie."